

House Judiciary Committee

April 18, 2007

Testimony on House Bill 4548 of 2007

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee:

I am Maxine Thome, Executive Director of the Michigan Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers. The Chapter represents about 8,000 licensed social workers in this State, including many of whom work in or with the State's Corrections system and with prisoners, victims, at-risk populations, and their families.

The Chapter strongly supports House Bill 4548, which seeks to ensure the enforcement of parole guidelines. NASW-MI has long been concerned about the increasing rates of incarceration and the declining rate of parole in Michigan and the accompanying costs to the State and its citizens. Particularly worrisome has been the apparent "warehousing of offenders in lock ups" approach to dealing with individuals who often have mental illness or substance abuse problems that would be much more effectively addressed in treatment facilities or out-patient services. NASW-MI strongly endorses a redirection of policy focus and resources toward prevention and treatment programs, and toward transition and support services for prisoners soon-to-be or recently released. Addressing a person's issues before he or she commits a crime and establishing programs to ease a parolee's transition back into the community are much more effective and cost-efficient than our current corrections practices. Enforcing parole guidelines would free financial resources for prevention and transition programs while still protecting the public.

Michigan's licensed social workers are uniquely qualified to address systemic issues that lead to high rates of incarceration. Educated and trained in a holistic, "person-in-environment" approach to problem-solving, licensed social workers can determine how resources can be used most effectively to prevent initial crimes and address recidivism. NASW-MI is pleased to offer its resources and the expertise of its members in developing prevention and treatment programs that will result in fewer crimes and a greater number of healthy, productive Michigan citizens.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of House Bill 4548. I would be happy to answer any questions at this time.



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Executive Director